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SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

Mideast

Key stories in the media:

All major media bannered copies of the first letter sent by Gilad Shalit in captivity in September or October 2006, two or three months after he was abducted. In the missive, Shalit complained of physical and mental hardships and asked the then Israeli leadership for quick action towards his release. Some media wondered why the

Shalit family decided to divulge the contents of the letter at this point. Israel Radio cited the official Chinese news agency Xinhua as saying yesterday that a Norwegian defense representative met last week with Hamas representatives to discuss the possibility that his countries -- and other European states -- would take in prisoners released by Israel in exchange for Shalit. The report allegedly state that Norway's contacts with Hamas started after Germany became involved in the mediation efforts, and that they dealt with the number of prisoners to be deported to Europe.

The media speculated on the reason behind a 14-hour QholeQ in PM Benjamin Netanyahu's schedule on Monday. Refuting claims in the Arab press that were relayed in some Israeli media that he had visited Arab states, Yediot revealed that Netanyahu made a secret visit to Russia, possibly to discuss sensitive Russian arms sales to Iran or Syria. HaQaretz and other media cited press agency reports saying that yesterday Russian FM Sergey Lavrov rejected speculation that the QArctic Sea,Q a hijacked Russian-crewed freighter, was carrying advanced S-300 missiles possibly destined for Iran.

Israel Radio quoted Egyptian Foreign Ministry Spokesman Husam Zaki as saying that Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak will not discuss the Shalit affair during his meeting with PM Netanyahu on Sunday. Zaki also reportedly said that Egypt does not condition Netanyahu's visit on a freeze in settlement construction and that the meeting should not be viewed as an encouragement of continued construction.

Israel Radio reported that, during a meeting with incoming U.S. Consul-General in Jerusalem Daniel Rubinstein, PA President Mahmoud Abbas urged the U.S. to continue its efforts to put an end to violations of the Roadmap.

Yediot reported that one third of the Knesset's Likud faction members are expected to take part in a meeting today that is intended to apply pressure on the PM on the issue of settlement construction. Makor Rishon-Hatzofe reported that at least four Likud cabinet ministers will attend the session. The Jerusalem Post reported that far-Right Likud activist Moshe Feiglin will be prevented from speaking at the event. Speaking on Israel Radio from Abuja, Nigeria, yesterday, FM Avigdor Lieberman said that the Right would not bring down the government and that his party, Yisrael Beiteinu, would not leave Netanyahu's coalition in the face of the anticipated freeze on new building in the West Bank.

The Jerusalem Post and other media reported that a group of public figures on the Left will launch an initiative in upcoming weeks to support PM Benjamin Netanyahu's efforts to advance the peace process. The group includes former ministers Ami Ayalon and Amnon Lipkin-Shahak, former deputy minister Dalia Rabin, former Foreign Ministry Director-General Avi Gil, former IAF commander Maj.-Gen. (res.) Eliezer Shkedy, and former Shin Bet chief Ya'acov Perry. They are seeking more public figures to join the campaign. The initiative, called Blue and White Peace, will try to persuade the public, via advertising, press interviews and parlor meetings, that creating a Palestinian state and pursuing the diplomatic process with the Palestinians and Arab countries is in Israel's interest. The organizers said the goal of the campaign was not to strengthen Netanyahu personally, but to persuade him that the public was behind whatever he would do to advance the diplomatic process.

The Jerusalem Post reported that U.S. Congressman Mike Rogers (R-MI), the ranking Republican on the House Intelligence Committee, told the newspaper yesterday that the U.S. administration needs to stick to its stated September deadline for stricter sanctions against Iran if the latter fails to offer a substantive response on engagement over its nuclear program. Rogers, a former FBI agent, was interviewed on the sidelines of the 9th Annual International Institute of Counter-Terrorism Conference at the Interdisciplinary Center in Herzliya.

Leading media reported that Turkish FM Ahmet Davutoglu called off a planned trip to Israel because Jerusalem would not assist him in entering Israel via Gaza.

The Jerusalem Post quoted sources close to Hamas in Gaza as saying yesterday that Hamas leader Khaled Mashal's recent visit to Egypt has brought the Islamist movement and Fatah closer to ending their differences.

Yediot and Israel Radio reported that the U.N. Human Rights Council-appointed fact-finding mission to investigate international human rights and humanitarian law violations related to Operation Cast Lead, which is headed by Judge Richard Goldstone, might demand that Israel be put on trial for war crimes. Maariv, The Jerusalem Post, and Israel Radio quoted the Israeli human rights BQTselem as saying that 770 of 1,400 Palestinian casualties in Operation Cast Lead were civilians; and 110 reportedly were children under the age of 10. Maariv quoted the IDF Spokesman's Office's response that the BQTselem report is tainted with extraneous interests. Maariv reported that Marc Garlasco, a senior member of the NGO Human Rights Watch, who has composed several anti-Israel reports, collects Nazi memorabilia.

The Jerusalem Post quoted Defense Secretary Robert Gates as saying in an interview published by Al Jazeera-TV yesterday that U.S. allies in the Middle East should strengthen their respective militaries to deter Iran from continuing its suspected nuclear weapons program.

HaQaretz and The Jerusalem Post reported that yesterday the Israel Lands Administration published tenders for the construction of 486 apartments in the neighborhood of Pisgat ZeQev in East Jerusalem.

Maariv reported that a group of experts who support the Northrop Grumman-developed Skyguard missile defense system have told PM Netanyahu and DM Ehud Barak that because of its slow response time, the Israeli-built Iron Dome system will not be able to protect Sderot and the Upper Galilee town of Kiryat Shmona from Qassam and Katyusha rockets.

The Jerusalem Post reported that defense officials and IDF officers told the newspaper that a continued Pentagon refusal to integrate Israeli systems into the stealth Joint Strike Fighter will likely cause delays in the arrival of the advanced fighter jet to Israel.

The Jerusalem Post reported that a one-day conference will be held on Capitol Hill in February (before the annual Jerusalem conference that will take place on February 15-17) under the banner QReinforcing U.S.-Israeli Ties.Q Among the participants will be lawmakers from both countries and other past and present leaders. The key discussions will focus on the unity of Jerusalem, the realities of the peace process, and regional threats to global security and how to confront them.

Israel Radio quoted Manhattan District Attorney Robert Morgenthau as saying yesterday in an address to the Brookings Institution in Washington that Iran is taking advantage of the Venezuelan banking system to bypass sanctions and purchase materials needed for its nuclear program.

The media reported that, in its annual report on education issued yesterday, the OECD published negative data on Israeli investment in education.

Leading media reported that the controversial Israeli ad campaign to counter assimilation of Diaspora youth was halted early this week after it drew angry reactions from many prominent American writers and even a few Israelis.

The Jerusalem Post and Makor Rishon-Hatzofe reported that yesterday the Jerusalem Municipality announced that the city will be split into seven operational zones in an effort to improve delivery of services.

The Jerusalem Post published the results of the August 2009 "War and Peace Index" of the Evans Program for Conflict Resolution Research of Tel Aviv University -- conducted August 31-September 1 -- that shows that despite the recent streak of violent incidents throughout the country, Jewish Israelis' sense of security is on the rise. However, the survey also shows that a majority of Israelis do not trust their government to withstand international political pressure and that most see an urgent need for a political solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

- Forty-nine percent of those surveyed define their personal security level as high or very high, 29% as medium, and only 19% as

low -- compared to April 2007, when 42.5% described their level as high, 32% as medium and 24% as low.

- In terms of national security, 38% of those surveyed felt the level is high, 37% said medium, and 22% said low. In 2007, the respective rates were 24.5%, 36% and 39%.

- The survey also shows that those who define themselves as "left" feel less worried about the national security situation than those describing themselves as "center" or "right." Fifty-one percent of those on the Left feel that national security levels are high, compared to 37% of the Center and 39% of the Right.

- The same correlation between political leanings and sense of security extends to the question of whether or not interviewees feared a large-scale attack against Israel by one or more Arab states. Twenty percent of those on the Left fear such an attack, compared to 40% in the Center and 44% on the Right. However, overall, a plurality of those surveyed -- 48% -- see a low or very low chance of such an attack in the next five years.

- There is no clear trend on the way the Israeli Jewish public sees the country's situation on the world stage. One third think Israel is moderately or very isolated, another third think Israel is not at all or is barely isolated, and the last third have no clear view on the issue.

- However, the survey shows a clear tendency on the part of the public to doubt the current government's ability to withstand international pressure in order to safeguard Israel's political and security interests. Fifty-four percent do not rely on the government's ability at all, or not very much, compared to 42% who moderately or very much rely on it. Among Left, Right and Center the majority do not trust the government's ability, though the percentage on the Left, 57%, is slightly higher.

- Almost all of those surveyed -- 85% -- rely on the IDF to defend Israel and its citizens in the face of an attack by Arab states. Nonetheless, a large majority -- 72% -- believe that the need to find a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is urgent. This sense of urgency is clear all along the political spectrum, but is strongest on the Left. The public trusts the IDF to deal with an attack, but would prefer a political solution.

Mideast:

Block Quotes:

1I. "In Olmert's Footsteps"

Diplomatic correspondent Aluf Benn wrote in the independent, left-leaning HaQaretz (9/9): QThe understanding taking shape between Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and the Obama administration on the freezing of settlements makes one wonder: What was the reason for changing governments in Jerusalem? Why was all that energy invested in an election campaign if Netanyahu was going to end up behaving like his predecessor, Ehud Olmert, and is willing to limit the Qright of Jews to live anywhere in the Land of IsraelQ? Has Netanyahu also given up on the right-wing ideology on which he was nurtured in his father's house in return for a group photograph with Presidents Barack Obama and Mahmoud Abbas?.... So, what has changed since Olmert? Mainly one thing: the declaration that there is a freeze on construction will, this time, be a public one, and it is meant to foster normalization efforts with the Arab states. Which is also what worries Netanyahu: What will he do if, at the end of the period allotted for a freeze, he gets nothing in return? Will he resume construction, against Obama's wishes, or will he be made to look like a sucker who gave up something for nothing? This dilemma remains unresolved for now, and it will continue to burden the Prime Minister.

II. "Losing the Blocs"

Dov Weisglass, who was former prime minister Ariel Sharon's top diplomatic advisor, wrote in the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot

Aharonot (9/9): QThe current dispute between Israel and the U.S. over the question of freezing construction in Judea and Samaria [i.e. the West Bank] is a sign that the U.S. is ceasing to recognize the practical format for a future territorial arrangement between the Israelis and Palestinians, i.e.: Israel would continue to maintain control over the large settlement centers in Judea and Samaria, and the remainder of the territory would be for a Palestinian state. On the basis of the assumption that this was the nature of the future arrangement, Israel achieved all the understandings and arrangements -- written and oral -- that enabled the continuation of limited construction and development in the large settlement blocs. The current government's insistence on not adhering to this outline, and the fact that it is refraining from raising it as an Israeli demand, will ultimately cause not only a construction freeze -- it will lead to the loss of diplomatic ability to continue to hold onto the large settlement blocs.

III. "Too Late"

Chief Economic Editor and senior columnist Sever Plotker wrote in the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (9/9): QHalf a million. Half a million Jewish Israelis have made their homes over the Green Line, the border between Israel and Jordan from 1967. Of these, 200,000 live in the territories that Israel has defined as part of greater Jerusalem and annexed to its sovereignty, and another 300,000 lives in the other areas of Judea and SamariaQor the West Bank.... If the number of Jews in all of Judea and Samaria, including the East Jerusalem areas, continues to grow at the current pace, the Jewish population over the QGreen LineQ that has been effaced from the consciousness of the Israelis will number about 750,000 in 2025. But today too, when the number is QonlyQ 500,000, the Jewish settlement in the territories has already determined Israel's fate to a large degree.... The evacuation of 8,000 Jewish settlers from the Gaza Strip and their absorption in Israel cost the taxpayers 10 billion shekels [around \$2.5 billion.5 billion]. Whoever wants to turn the wheel back and evacuate the Israelis from the territories beyond the 1967 borders, will have to invest about 600 billion shekels [around around50 billion] to do so. This is a completely imaginary price.... Without the Palestinians having understood the process, and without most of the Israeli citizens having paid attention to it, the territories beyond the 1967 borders have become the main absorption area of new Jewish populations: Immigrants from the former Soviet Union, young Jerusalemites, ultra-Orthodox Jews in distress and more. The QterritoriesQ have served as Israel's territorial rear and filled this role with great success. The political left wing in Israel believes that it has gained the upper hand, and brings as conclusive proof of this the declaration of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, an integral part of the Likud, in support of a conditional Palestinian state. The left wing is wrong: While it was dealing with the futile Qdiplomatic process,Q the active political right wing, with the backing and assistance of all of Israel's governments save one, engaged in developing the Jewish settlements in the territories. Half a million Jews over the Green Line is a point of no return. The talk of a Qconstruction freezeQ or Qsuspension of constructionQ in certain settlements are a mockery and an attempt to cover the rear end of leaders -- in Israel, in Palestine, around the world -- who know deep down inside that the die has been cast. In the area of Mandatory Palestine, between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea, an inseparable tangle has been created of two peoples -- an omelet of Jews and Palestinians that cannot be turned into separate eggs. It is too late.

IV. "Obama's Teachable Mideast Moment"

Columnist Michael Freund, who was an assistant to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu during his first term in office, wrote in the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post (9/9): QFor a president who has been in office for just over seven months, Barack Obama can at last point to some meaningful change that he has brought about in the Middle East. Thanks to his administration's arm-twisting and bullying of Jerusalem over settlements, Obama has unwittingly succeeded in galvanizing the Israeli public like never before. The result is a broad coalition that extends all the way from the moderate left, through the center, and over to the reasonable right, giving Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu plenty of political breathing space.... If and when a final-status deal is ever negotiated, it is crucial that the Americans and Palestinians go

into the talks aware that Israel is self-confident enough to stand firm on issues it views as vital to its existence. This is what Obama himself would likely refer to as a Qteachable momentQ on the Middle East -- one from which he still has a lot to learn. In a short period, he has hardened the Palestinian position, strengthened the hand of Israel's settlement enterprise and led the Israeli public to reassess its blind faith in Washington. That's quite a record of achievement.

IV. QObstacle to Peace

The Jerusalem Post editorialized (9/9): QForget the settlements. If the world truly wants to identify an obstacle to peace, it could do much worse than cast its eyes toward Arab League Secretary-General Amr Moussa. For nearly 18 years Amr Moussa, first as Egypt's Foreign Minister for a decade, and then for the last eight years as head of the Arab League, has worked mightily to poison the atmosphere against Israel.... This week, however, Moussa outdid himself. With U.S. Envoy George Mitchell trying to line up some normalization gestures from the Arab states toward Israel as part of a package to relaunch the diplomatic process, Moussa did what he could to stand in the way. At a press conference in Cairo with Hamas leader Khaled Mashal, Moussa warned there would be a harsh response against any Arab country making gestures to Israel. QIt is impossible to talk of normalization when Israel refuses to take real steps,Q Moussa said. QNo Arab state will offer Israel gifts on a silver platter.Q What Moussa evidently has yet to internalize is that peace is not a gift to Israel, but rather to the region.... That hatred spreads. The New York Times ran a story from Cairo Sunday about the refurbishing of ancient Jewish sites there as part of the controversial Egyptian Culture Minister's campaign to head UNESCO. One man in the street, a certain Khalid Badr, was asked about his feeling toward Jews and Qas casually as if he had E been asked the time,Q replied: QWe hate them for everything they have done to us.Q It is that matter-of-fact hatred, a hatred that Moussa has both stirred and benefited from, that keeps the diplomatic process mired in square one.

VI. QWhy Stop with Elbit?

Far-left Palestinian affairs correspondent Amira Hass wrote in Ha'aretz (9/9): QThe question is not why Norway divested from the [Israeli] defense electronics giant Elbit Systems, but why only now, and why only from that company?.... The Norwegian Finance Ministry's Council on Ethics, which recommended that the pension fund pull its investment from Elbit, also explained why it would divest from that company but not, say, from the U.S. company Caterpillar. Elbit, it said, developed equipment used specifically in the construction of the separation barrier, while the equipment sold by Caterpillar to the Israel Defense Forces has legitimate uses as well, and the company should not be held responsible for it being employed in another, possibly illegal, way (namely, the wholesale destruction of Palestinian homes).... [Anyway,] this is the first time a nation has adopted -- actively and not just with words -- the opinion of the International Court of Justice in the Hague about the separation barrier, 87 percent of which is built on occupied land, in contravention of international law.

CUNNINGHAM